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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000425

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ELAB](#) [ETRD](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [ASEC](#) [CU](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: DEMONSTRATIONS IN TEGUCIGALPA: FOCUS IS ON GOH
POLICIES, BUT SUB-THEMES ARE ANTI-U.S. AND PRO-CUBA

REF: A. 02 TEGUCIGALPA 2987
[1](#)B. 02 TEGUCIGALPA 2928

Classified By: Political Chief Francisco Palmieri;
Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Political demonstrations continue off and on in Tegucigalpa, led by various small organizations, the loose political alliance known as the Popular Block, secondary teachers (COPEMH), and others. Sometimes the protests are staged outside the Embassy, but more commonly they are held downtown in front of Congress. Frequently, many of the "demonstrators" are bused in from outside Tegucigalpa. These "protesters for hire" are paid for their services prior to leaving Tegucigalpa. At some of the smaller demonstrations, few of the demonstrators, other than the leaders, appear to be from Tegucigalpa. While persistent, they pose little threat to social order and do not appear to have captured the broader general public's support or interest.

[1](#)2. (U) The most recent demonstration outside the Embassy occurred January 30 with about 100-130 demonstrators organized by the Civic Council of Popular Organizations and Indigenous of Honduras (COPINH), and led by Salvadore Zuniga. Protesters opposed a possible war in Iraq, privatization, and "neocolonialism." The demonstrators also criticized Plan Colombia, CAFTA, U.S. policy in Cuba and Venezuela, U.S. military cooperation with Honduras, and the electricity contract for U.S. company AES. The group then linked up with a larger group downtown organized by the Popular Block. At the end of this larger demonstration protesters were told that there would be worldwide demonstrations at U.S. embassies, including in Tegucigalpa, on Saturday, February [1](#)5. The press has also repeated information about a possible anti-U.S. demonstration February 15.

[1](#)3. (U) Demonstrations are often pro-Cuban in flavor, such as the December 5, 2002 demonstration by 200 people outside the Embassy organized by the Honduras-Cuba Friendship Association (AHC), which protested alleged U.S. injustices against Cuba. The same day a larger demonstration downtown protested against the "privatization" of health services. Carlos Reyes, leader of the Popular Block, criticized alleged U.S. "imperialism" at the larger demonstration.

[1](#)4. (U) The Popular Block and the secondary teachers are the most frequent demonstrators. They protest privatization, civil service salary levels, and the public health system. These protests, however, are usually focused on GOH policies and not the USG, although they often have a anti-USG sub-text to them. Popular Block leader Carlos Reyes has also written an anti-CAFTA and anti-FTAA booklet.

[1](#)5. (C) Comment: None of the recent demonstrations, unlike one in October 2002 (ref A), have been violent, and they are still more a worry than a serious problem for the Maduro Administration. Protests, however, are likely to heat up over a draft Civil Service Framework Bill, which the GOH has yet to introduce to Congress, that will likely de-link civil service salaries from being indexed to raises in the minimum wage. Post also notes that there may be Cuban support for some of the anti-U.S. demonstrations, as evidenced by the December 5 demonstration organized by the Honduras-Cuba Friendship Association and the continual criticism of U.S. policy on Cuba in kitchen-sink style protests. End Comment.
Palmer